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ABSTRACT

A longitudinal study of the economic self-sufficiency and academic achievement of Indochinese refugees, commonly known as "Boat People," concludes that cultural background and family influence play key roles in achievement in American society. Statistical data were drawn from two surveys of 6,775 individuals in 1,384 Chinese, Laotian, and Vietnamese refugee households conducted in 1981 and 1984 in the following urban areas: (1) Boston; (2) Chicago; (3) Houston; (4) Orange County (California); and (5) Seattle. Despite national, ethnic, cultural, and religious diversity, the three groups share the following values: (1) the foundation of culture; (2) family-based achievement; (3) hard work; (4) the role of the family in society; (5) self-reliance and pride; and (6) coping and integration. Analyses of hundreds of predictor variables of achievement using both quantitative and qualitative techniques suggest that family influence is the single factor that affects both economic and academic achievement. The refugee families are able to translate their cultural values into a lifestyle that helps its members take advantage of economic and educational opportunities. Based on the refugees' experiences, educational reform could benefit from increased sensitivity to cultural values and parent involvement. Six tables of statistical data, 15 figures, and a map are included. The following material is appended: (1) a discussion of the survey methodology; (2) a discussion of supplementary economic and scholastic statistical data; (3) an analysis of the impact of demographic factors and refugee intervention programs on economic and academic outcomes; and (4) a 310-item bibliography. An index is also included. (FMW)

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